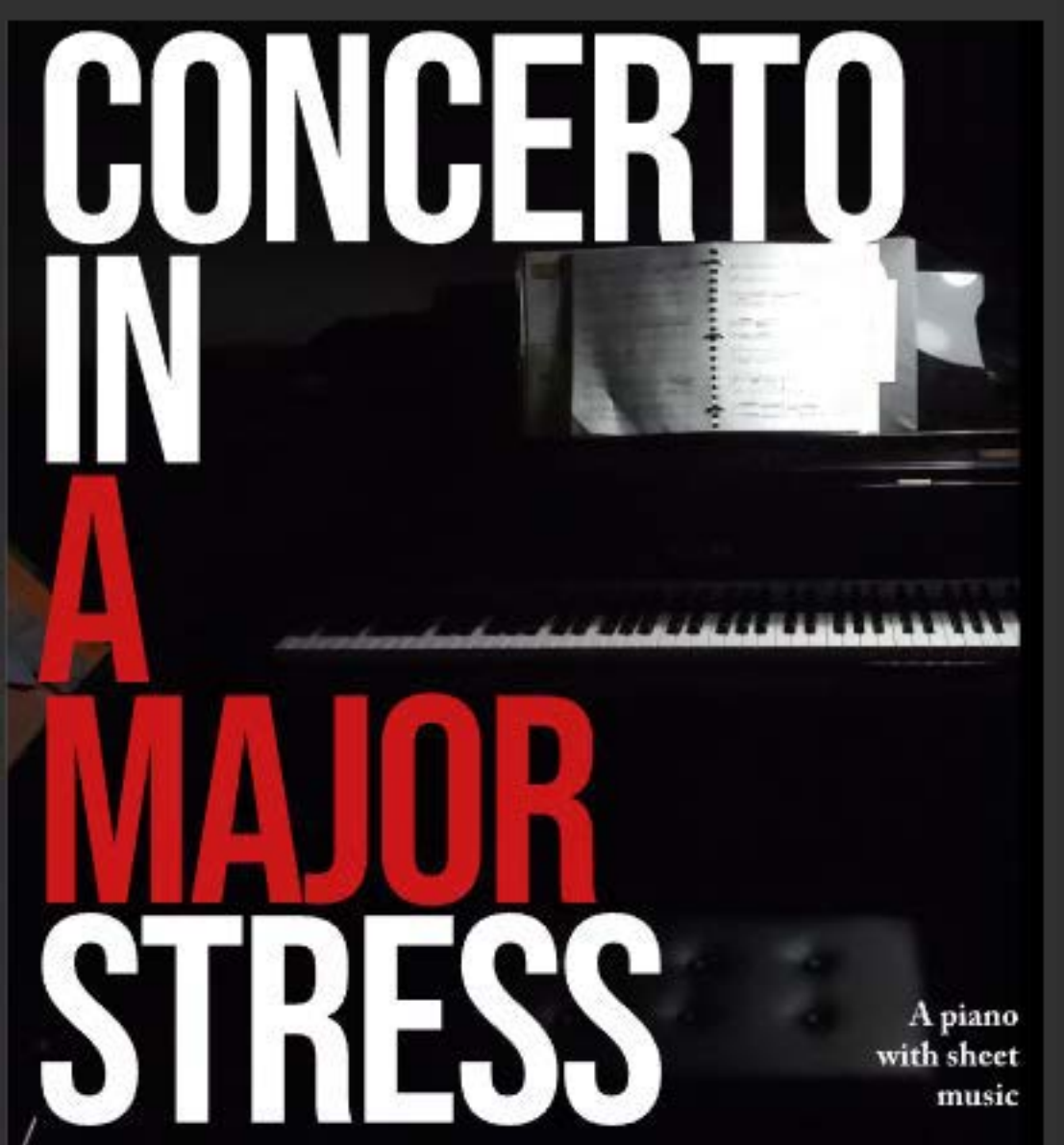
CONCERTO IN A MAJOR STRESS



A piano with sheet music

WHAT THE CONCERTO COMPETITION IS AND HOW THIS YEAR'S COMPETITORS ARE "HANDEL"ING IT

Early in the golden morning, a student walks down the empty music hall. Finding a place near the door of the Strings room, they sit and wait for a teacher to unlock the door. In one hand, they carry a violin case, the other, a binder. This binder contains a couple pages of a violin-and-piano score, maybe more. It might be unassuming to some, but to this student, it's the highlight of their year, maybe even of their high school career.

Whether or not you're part of the music program, at some point you've heard of a type of orchestral piece called a concerto. This type of orchestral music features a musician of any instrument/voice by letting them show off their musicality skills (e.g., piano concerto, flute concerto, etc.), and can be found in a solo-and-orchestra format

or a solo-and-piano format. Concertos are a really big deal in the music program, so much so that every year in late October to early November, the Concerto Competition takes place. Students vie for first place by playing their chosen concerto with an accompanying pianist, so I talked with the strings teacher who organizes this competition about the Concerto Competition, Janice Mah.



Ron Harrel, Gr. 11 Violinist

"CHS music has been hosting a concerto competition since 2017, and each year (minus covid years!) there is only 1 winner who will be chosen to perform with our very own Canterbury Honors Orchestra," explains Ms. Mah.

She accentuates how this competition and its competitors showcase individual excellence. "I am always so proud of everyone who competes. It's not easy to put yourself out there, and I am in awe every year."

> "...In the end, it's how you play the piece that matters, not if you play the piece like Noteflight would."
>
> — Ron Harrel

It's quite the opportunity to play with our amazing orchestra, so I talked with two of our competitors and one non-competing student to discover what this competition meant to them.

"It's an opportunity for me to perform a concerto in front of people!" declares Nika Raytsin, a Grade 12 violinist performing the first movement of Concerto No. 3 in B minor by Camille Saint-Saëns.

"I often use it as a way for me [as] kind of a goalpost, so I'm able to complete my concerto and have it ready [by the deadline]."

She emphasizes that while most competitors don't win the prized performance opportunity, it's still a great experience to establish how to learn and prep a concerto in the space of a few months. (Yes, learning a concerto through the summer break is a thing!) She also mentions that this competition helps her to set a tone for future performances, as she does a lot of them. This competition - as it is the first big performance to happen in the school year - helps segue into much more stressful performances by being held in the auditorium, performing for just friends, family, and the adjudicator.


Mars Swenson, Gr. 12 violinist

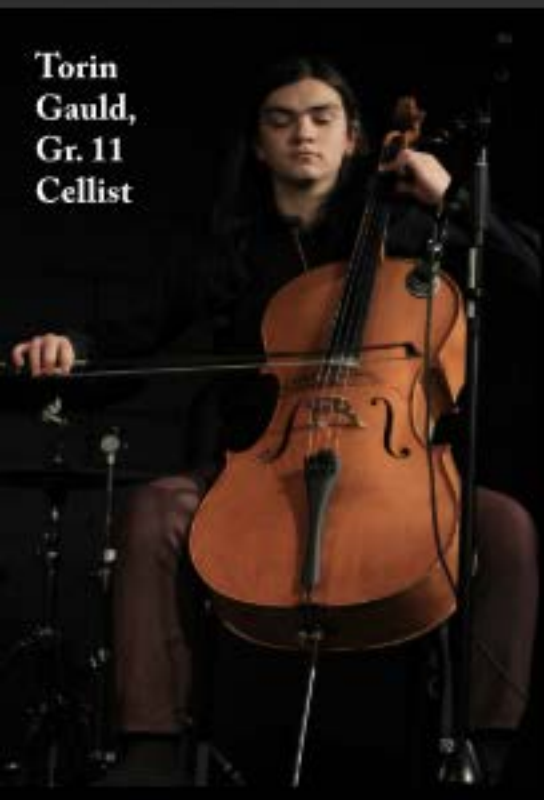
Rohan McGowan, a Grade 10 trombonist who's not doing the competition, had a similar opinion of the competition.

"It's a fun little way for music students to get together and have fun playing music," he explains.

On the other hand, there are some people who take this competition a different way.

"Concerto Competition to me is kind of an opportunity to showcase how far you've come since entering the school since it's mostly older grades that do it," explains Ron Harrel, who's a Grade 11 violinist performing the first movement of Felix Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto in E minor.

"[You can also] have fun with your peers, competing for [first place] and having fun with it."



Torin Gauld, Gr. 11 Cellist

When competing for such a huge opportunity, it's only fair that people get stressed about it. I also asked them about their ways of dealing with nervousness.

Ms. Mah believes that performers should believe in themselves and go for it, as any performance, big or small, is hard. "After a few years of teaching a unit on recital strategies- I've learned a lot from the students about the importance of breathing and how it can help regulate anxiety and stress. Don't practice too slowly, don't practice too fast. Practice smart!"

Nika had mostly the same idea.

"This is so cliché, but breathing helps!" she says. "I have anxiety, and the one thing they constantly tell you, breathe."

She mentions how there are a lot of meditation techniques that can also help you relax. Nika also recommends not over-practicing the day before a performance, as she not so fondly remembers how she spent 4 hours running through a concerto for last year's competition.

"Then I got to perform it and I was like: 'I'm dead. I'm done. I've run this through so many times I don't remember what I'm doing anymore.' I [had] no feeling about it and I didn't play it as well as I could've. Not because I didn't know it, but because I was just done with it."

"Prepare early. Preparing not just the physical demands of the piece, but musically."

— Ms. Mah, strings teacher

But then, how do you practice for such a competition?

"One very good practice technique I use is slow practice," explains Ron. "There's a couple sections, I can think of three that I'm working on right now, where it involves a lot of shifting and moving up to high positions on the E string and back down quickly again."

He explains how if he didn't use slow practicing, the entire section sounds sloppy.

"But after a couple rounds of slow practicing, the music starts coming together and you can hear the individual notes better," he concludes.

As these musicians returned to what they were doing before, I left them with one final question: What would you say to someone who wants to do this competition next year?

"Do it. Genuinely, a lot of people hear the word 'competition' and freak out. They're like: 'OMG, I'm going to die!'" laughs Nika. "What's the harm? Even if you don't do as well as you think [you] did, you get to learn and prepare a concerto, and if you [win], you get to play with the orchestra! You know, you have more to gain than to lose."

"I would say work hard, have fun while you're at it and put your heart and soul into it," Ron states.

To him, a performer can play all the correct notes, but in the end it's how they play the piece that matters, and not if they play the piece like a robot.

"I say, give it your best shot, like the worst that can happen is you mess up a few notes." Rohan concludes.

So, there you have it, folks. Be sure to stop by the auditorium November 1st at 6:30 pm to watch Torin Gauld, Nadya Bissett, Mars Swenson, Toni Melessanakis, Ron Harrel, Nika Raytsin, and Bri Meng perform!